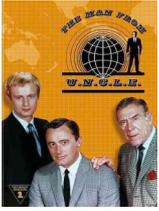


The Man From U.N.C.L.E. (Television Series)



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The 1960's was the time of the 'Cold War' and the 'Iron Curtain' Both of these terms were indicative of our relationship with Russia during those years. We may not have been in a shooting war, but we were very much at odds with them in terms of our political philosophies and both countries were very much concerned that these differing political philosophies would spread or worse contaminate their own people. So it is surprising that one of the most popular spy shows on television in the sixties featured an organization made up of agents from many different countries with no regard to the political affiliation or beliefs of their home countries. In fact, the organization's two top agents and their best team consisted of American agent Napoleon Solo (Robert Vaughn) and Russian agent Illya Kuryakin (David McCallum). The series was known as '*The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*' and it was popular enough to spawn several made-for-TV movies, a spin-off series known as '*The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*,' and an attempted movie reboot in 2015.

Napoleon Solo was modeled to an extent after Ian Fleming's James Bond and Fleming himself was an occasional advisor for the original pilot. In many ways watching an episode of '*The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*' was a little bit like watching a short James Bond film. It was all there, the special gadgets, an organization bent on world domination or extortion and there was often an attractive lady incorporated into the plot. Originally the show was to focus mainly on the role of Napoleon Solo, in fact, one of the working titles for the pilot was simply '*Solo*,' but it quickly began shifting to a more team oriented approach. One reason for this was the popularity of David McCallum's Illya Kuryakin. While Napoleon seemed to be suave and sophisticated. Illya was more unemotional and duty orientated, but you knew there were strong feelings and emotions underlying the character and this made him perhaps the more three-dimensional and, therefore, appealing of the two. In many ways, his popularity on the series mirrored that of an unemotional pointy-eared alien of another famous series of the sixties. Interestingly enough the networks involved in both shows requested that these characters be removed. In the case of the alien, the producer fought to retain him. The character of Illya was more of a matter of luck. The network told the producers to, 'lose the foreign guy.' The producers thought they were talking about Will Kuluva who played the Head of U.N.C.L.E in the pilot when they were, in fact, talking about the Kuryakin Character. They replaced Kuluva with Leo G. Carroll as Alexander Waverly who was more obviously playing the role as an American and David McCallum remained in the series as a result of this misunderstanding. By the time the misunderstanding was realized the part of Illya Kuryakin was established and popular.

In the show, U.N.C.L.E. was the acronym for an organization known as the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement and every episode, TV movie and spin off's end credits always included the following statement, "We wish to thank the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement without whose assistance this program would not be possible." Of all the incarnations of this series, only the 2015 movie failed to include this statement. Of course, there isn't and never was and an organization known as U.N.C.L.E. We would know if there was 'Right'?

Posted by Keith C. on June 21, 2016

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